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RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHSI #2018/01 3041715  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 301715Z OCT 08 ZDK  
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0311  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 002018

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/CARC

E.O 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: LOW TURNOUT EXPECTED FOR NOVEMBER 3 ELECTIONS IN  
ADJARA AND TBILISI

REF: A) TBILISI 1072

¶1. Summary and comment: On November 3 elections will be held for the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, which is institutionally an important component of Adjara's autonomy but a plays a minimal national role. By-elections for the national Parliament will also take place in two districts of Tbilisi. The seats in Tbilisi were vacated by opposition politicians who declined to take their seats following the May elections. Seven political parties are participating in the Adjara elections and five are running in Tbilisi. The ruling United National Movement (UNM) and Industrialists are participating in the Adjara elections, but not in Tbilisi; UNM chose not to run in the Tbilisi by-elections, partly to allow space for opposition parties in the Parliament, given their current majority. Public interest and media coverage of the elections are generally low. The UNM is likely to win the majority of the Adjaran Supreme Council seats. The Christian Democrats, who are getting positive public feedback for taking their seats in Parliament are favored in Tbilisi. Results are unlikely to affect policy in Tbilisi, but some analysts will undoubtedly interpret the results of these elections as an indication of public views on the Government's performance during and since the August conflict with Russia. End summary and comment.

¶2. On November 3, elections will be held in Adjara (a semi-autonomous region in southwest Georgia, bordering Turkey) for the Supreme Council, or local Adjaran parliament. The Adjaran Supreme Election Council is conducting the elections. Seven parties are competing for 18 seats. Three of the parties, the Christian-Democratic Movement (CDM), "We Ourselves," and "Qartuli Dasi" (Georgian Group), make up the minority in Georgia's national Parliament. The other four parties include: the ruling UNM, Industrialists, "Georgian Politics," and the United Communist Party of Georgia. Most opposition parties, including those that were part of the united opposition coalition, are boycotting the elections (despite their calls in Tbilisi for new parliamentary or presidential elections). The Conservative Party publicly admitted that it registered for the elections only to take advantage of guaranteed televised airtime allocated to parties during the electoral campaign. Although the Conservative Party has not nominated candidates, the party is using the airtime to call on voters to boycott the election and support the Conservatives' agenda.

¶3. Most opposition parties boycotting the elections cite the new political reality they claim has emerged since the August conflict, as their reason not to participate. However, the Labor Party announced its boycott before August. Other opposition parties, including the Republican Party (which is historically strong in Adjara), say that there are more important priorities than the local elections in Adjara, including working out joint opposition tactics on how to achieve an early general election. According to the results of NDI focus groups in Adjara, voters see the Supreme Council as not affecting their daily lives in any way and are therefore, not interested in participating in these elections

¶4. By-elections are also scheduled for November 3 in the Vake and Didube single-mandate constituencies of Tbilisi. The Central Election Commission (CEC) is conducting these by-elections. Both contests were called following the June resignation of the candidates elected in May (reftel), the New Rightists' Davit Qcandidates elected in May (reftel), the New Rightists' Davit Gamkrelidze and Davit Saganeldze, in protest at what they called "the fraudulent May 21 parliamentary elections." The recent International Republican Institute poll on political attitudes indicated that the Georgian public supported the CDM's decision to enter Parliament and work within existing political frameworks. This was reflected in increasing public confidence in the CDM, and significant drops by the non-Parliamentary opposition. Interestingly, the CDM is running a candidate only in Vake district and not in Didube. This may lend credence to claims by some that the CDM is colluding with the UNM. However, CDM's candidate, Tamaz Kvachantiradze, was Minister of Education under Shevardnadze and is well-known and respected. The CDM may be focusing its limited resources on just one candidate in order to maximize efforts. The CDM is also working hard, en masse, in the Adjara campaign. This may be yet another sign that the party is further pursuing its public agenda of creating a grassroots party.

¶5. Most opposition parties are also boycotting these majoritarian by-elections in Tbilisi. The UNM has refused to nominate candidates, "since the seats were won by the opposition." In addition, a win by the UNM in either constituency would simply add additional seats to its already lopsided parliamentary majority. The opposition Industrialists and Conservatives are refusing to run in Tbilisi. The Conservatives are not putting candidates forward for the parliament, as they consider the current Parliament illegitimate due to flawed elections in May 2008. While the Industrialists have not publicly explained why they are not running a candidate in Tbilisi, it is likely due to their solidarity with

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the New Rightists who renounced seats in parliament following the May election. Only six parties have registered candidates for Tbilisi: the CDM, We Ourselves, Qartuli Dasi (Georgian Group), National Democratic party (NDP), "Georgian Politics" and the Radical-Democrats.

¶6. Public interest in both the Adjara and Tbilisi elections is low. The Georgian public, having already experienced a presidential and parliamentary election in 2008, appear to have election fatigue. In addition, the August conflict with Russia has many citizens thinking of security and not elections. Consequently, public interest in the elections is low. The public does not view the elections as a referendum on Saakashvili, his management of the conflict or the National Movement party.

¶7. Both the CEC and international election-related organizations expect low turnout. Media coverage during the pre-election period was low, and lingering questions about the quality of the voters' list (i.e. names of deceased, others not in Georgia remaining on the list) could also be potentially problematic. Embassy Tbilisi and USAID will send three teams of election observers to Adjara, as well as visit polling stations in Tbilisi. The UK Embassy and some others will also observe; ODIHR and OSCE will not be formally observing these races.

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